

Islam needs 'hearts and minds' reform

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ABSTRACT

Islam has never had its own version of the Reformation and the Enlightenment or a consequent acceptance of pluralism and the separation of church and state.

FULL TEXT

AROUND the world, terrorists screaming Allah-u-Akbar are killing decent people going about their daily lives.

So far, three innocent people have died in terrorist incidents in Australia: Katrina Dawson and Tori Johnson in the Martin Place siege a year ago; and Curtis Cheng outside Parramatta police station in October.

So far, our police and security services have responded with great professionalism to the terrorist threat. At every level, though, our response needs to escalate as the danger intensifies.

In the past few weeks, there's been the bombing of a Russian airliner over Sinai killing 224 people, the multiple attacks in Paris killing 130, bombings in the Middle East killing 75, the massacre of 14 people in California (it now seems), and a four-day lockdown of Brussels.

Dealing with terrorism, and the Islamist fanaticism that inspires it, is the great challenge of our time.

Obviously, there needs to be a strong security response at home and abroad. We need to be able to deal with terrorists and would-be terrorists here in Australia and to destroy the so-called Islamic State caliphate in Syria and Iraq that's inspiring them.

My government boosted funding to police and security agencies, passed four sets of legislation with more power to arrest and detain terror suspects, and committed to stripping terrorists who are dual nationals of their citizenship.

Australian jets are bombing terrorist targets in the Middle East and our soldiers are advising and training the Iraqi army.

At best, this is containing the death cult but not destroying it. That's why the United States is now sending special operations troops into the Middle East to fight rather than just to advise and train.

President Barack Obama is now showing the will to win that's needed for a safer world, and he needs our support.

PM Malcolm Turnbull is talking to our allies about what else we might do: this could include more RAAF support

for the air campaign and allowing our soldiers to broaden their mission to help local forces.

The security response is necessary but it's not sufficient. There also needs to be a concerted "hearts and minds" campaign against the versions of Islam that make excuses for terrorists.

Although most Muslims reject terrorism, some are all too ready to justify "death to the infidel".

Surveys of British and French Muslims show up to 30 per cent sympathising with the aims if not the methods of Islamic State.

Demonising Islam generally or all Muslims could bring on the "clash of civilisations" that academic Samuel Huntington feared two decades back and make "Islam's bloody borders" even more dangerous. But we can't remain in denial about the massive problem within Islam.

Islam has never had its own version of the Reformation and the Enlightenment or a consequent acceptance of pluralism and the separation of church and state.

Fortunately, there are many Muslim leaders who think their faith needs to modernise from the kill-or-be-killed milieu of the Prophet Muhammad.

A year ago, President el-Sisi of Egypt told the imams of the Al-Azhar University in Cairo that Islam needed nothing less than a "religious revolution" to correct centuries of false ideas that were making Islam a menace to the wider world.

When Islamic State first swept into Iraq, Prime Minister Najib of Malaysia said that it was "against God, against Islam and against our common humanity".

After one of his worshippers killed a police employee, the chairman of the Parramatta mosque declared that "if you don't like Australia, leave".

Islam needs to delegitimise the urge to "behead all those who insult the Prophet" but only Muslims can do this.

That's why everyone interested in a safer world should be reaching out to "live-and-let-live" Muslims and encouraging them to reclaim their faith from the zealots.

In Australia, that means talking to decent people who happen to be Muslim as well as to "official" Muslims inclined to see "Islamophobia" in any criticism.

Sydney's Daily Telegraph reported local Muslim leaders blaming Islamic State on Western foreign policy but this self-excusing rubbish ignores the fact that the death cult's victims have mostly been Muslims who think differently. It's also time Australians stopped being apologetic about the values that have made our country as free, fair and prosperous as any on Earth.

Where hate preaching is not illegal it should at least be answered point by point with a very robust defence of human rights and responsibilities.

It's not culturally insensitive to demand loyalty to Australia and respect for Western civilisation.

Cultures are not all equal. We should be ready to proclaim the clear superiority of our culture to one that justifies killing people in the name of God. TONY ABBOTT IS A FORMER PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA

Credit: TONY ABBOTT

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